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SUBJECT: TIBET EXPERT ON BREAKDOWN IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH PRC; BEIJING
OPPOSES U.S. TIBET ASSISTANCE, NGO PRESENCE

REF: A) CHENGDU 184, B) CHENGDU 189, C) CHENGDU 181

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CLASSIFIED BY: David E. Brown, Consul General, U.S. Consulate
General Chengdu.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Both the Dalai Lama and the PRC leadership are to blame for the breakdown in Tibetan-China negotiations, the Director of the Mountain Institute's China Program told us. This Amcit Director, a seasoned Chinese and Tibetan-speaker, said irredentist Tibetans fail both to focus on the long-term survival of their culture, and to discern a split within the PRC leadership on whether to negotiate now or wait for the Dalai Lama's death. With an emerging China no longer feeling as vulnerable to international pressure on human rights, Tibetans should try to raise non-confrontational issues and look for negotiating space within the current PRC constitution, he suggested.

¶2. (C) The PRC does not want USG-funded programs in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), nor is it really comfortable with any NGOs operating there, he felt. Tensions following last year's unrest in Tibetan areas remain high, while participation in the economy remains extremely challenging for Tibetans. End Summary.

¶3. (C) CG and PolEconOff met September 30 with Christopher La Due, Director for Asia and Country Director for China of The Mountain Institute (TMI), the first international NGO allowed to operate in the TAR (starting in 1986). La Due is a Chinese and Tibetan-speaking investment banker turned NGO manager who did PhD work at Columbia University and spent six years living in Lhasa as part of his total of ten years in China. Because of his educational background and China experience, La Due offered an insightful take on prospects for negotiations between the Dalai Lama and the PRC leadership and the challenges faced by NGOs in Tibetan areas.

Both Sides to Blame for Stalled Negotiations

¶4. (C) La Due found fault with both the Dalai Lama and the PRC leadership for stalled talks. The PRC, for its part, feels it has the United States and Europe "over a barrel" due to the current economic climate, but could gain respect on the world stage by negotiating with the Dalai Lama, he said. Tibet is kind of "small potatoes" in terms of China's emergence onto the world stage ("they're going global"), he felt, but remains a key issue in relations with the West, and therefore presents an opportunity for China to gain the international credibility it seeks.

Tibetans "Blew Their Chance", Don't See PRC Split

15. (C) Parceling out equal blame to the Tibetans, La Due said the fact that China does not feel vulnerability to foreign pressure on such issues as it had in the past means the Tibetans "blew their chance" for real progress during negotiations in the late 80's during the time of Party Secretary Hu Yaobang. (Note: In the early 1980s, Hu Yaobang, following a fact-finding trip to Tibet that led him to severely criticize PRC policy, advocated a two-prong solution of increasing investment, while also increasing Han respect for Tibetan culture. The reforms were cut short by 1987 riots in Lhasa, leading to martial law in 1989, and the abandonment of the strategy's second prong. End Note.)

16. (C) In the current environment, the Tibetans and PRC leaders continue to engage in positional bargaining without a focus on outcomes, La Due felt. In discussing goals, for example, Tibetan exile leaders often begin by showing him a map of areas of the PRC they want restored to Tibetan control, rather than focusing on the outcome of actual Tibetan survival. Asked by the Dalai Lama while sitting on his couch in Dharamsala whether the Tibetan strategy was rational and fair, La Due replied, "Yes, it's rational and it's fair, but it's not realistic."

17. (C) Further, the Tibetans do not understand that there is a division, at least in La Due's view, within the PRC leadership. There are those who would prefer to just wait to take action until after the Dalai Lama dies, and those who believe it would be better to attempt to resolve issues while the Dalai Lama is still alive -- otherwise China will see more unrest like that of March 2008, and may realize its worst fears of seeing synergy between the Tibetans and other restive groups like Xinjiang's Uighurs, he said.

So, Where to Begin?

18. (C) In La Due's opinion, there is room for negotiation within the current Chinese constitution and room for dialogue on issues that are non-confrontational. They could find space to negotiate within Chapter I Article 4 (stating all nationalities

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are equal) or Article 31 (allowing for establishment of special administrative regions like Hong Kong and Macao), for example. More importantly, he says, the Tibetans should put aside the map and start with things that affect Tibetans today: health, jobs, education, the environment, religion. More intractable issues could be tabled in the short-term while progress is made on issues that ultimately affect the survival of Tibetan culture.

"The PRC Doesn't Want These Programs in Tibet"

19. (C) Commenting on the difficulty of working in Tibetan areas with USG funding (Ref A), La Due said the PRC would prefer to see no such programs. In his view, however, PRC leaders feel compelled to allow such activities to continue, mainly as a means of satisfying U.S. Congressional interest. LaDue recalled a meeting in Beijing four years ago with then Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhou Wenzhong (current PRC Ambassador to the United States), who told him, "We're not comfortable with you getting money from Congress. The Special Coordinator is a bad idea. U.S. foreign policy is stupid." In response, La Due asked, "So, is your position that this money from the American people is not welcome in China?" "No, that is not my position," Zhou conceded.

Nor Any NGOs in Tibet, For That Matter

110. (C) La Due agreed with the assessment offered by other observers that NGOs (domestic and international) are being forced to shut down or relocate outside the TAR (Ref B), saying so many have gone that he could not begin to name them all. TMI left the TAR in 2005, relocating its projects to Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces, a move that pleased the central government,

La Due reported. (Note: Though La Due did not offer a specific reason for the move, Country Director for the Tibet Poverty Alleviation Fund Tony Gleason told CG in an August meeting in Shangri-la that TMI had essentially been forced out of the TAR after accepting USG funds (Ref A). End Note.) At the same time, TMI opened an office in Beijing, which "made the central government more comfortable," La Due added.

On Tensions, Tourism, Government, and Economics

¶11. (C) Commenting on trends in Tibetan areas, La Due said that since March 2008 unrest in Tibetan areas things have been "tighter" and more sensitive, and that Chinese decision-makers are less likely to make risky choices. Having done a great deal of work with monks, he said he has not observed a particular fervor among them for getting into the tourism business, though he said sometimes they do welcome the money, and at other times they wonder where all the money goes. As for relations with the government, the monks would simply prefer to not have the police or military stationed nearby and would like to be able to make their own decisions regarding the size of the monastic community, he says.

¶12. (C) Economically, La Due argued that Tibetans are more able to compete in areas where they traditionally have had contact with Han Chinese, where they can access the education system, and where they have grown up using Chinese. "Language is really at the heart of the issue," he said. (Note: See Ref C for more on these issues. End Note.)
BROWN